# G. K. Chesterton Delivers Himself of Sayings That Stagger Kate Carew

## The Author of "Orthodoxy" and Many Another Notable Bit of Literary Work Serves Tea in His Home at Beaconsfield and Drinks as Much of It as His Famous "Prototype," Dr. Samuel Johnson.

By Kate Carew.

THE House of Chesterton is a house divided against itself!

There are two brothers who represent it. One is big and one is little, but both are decidedly portly. One is a redhot Socialist, a Suffragist, and many more 'ists. The other strikes out on lines of his own, about which you shall hear, but both write, lecture and discuss in public and in private.

Two of them! Good gracious! Could I manage to interview them ensemble? Would they talk together or singly? Would they wrangle over my queries and forget all about poor, little me in the joy of battle, and should I look at one as I asked a question of the other?

It was all very puzzling, but it solved itself, because when I went to the House of Chesterton, lo, only Gilbert K. was there! Cecil had gone to a Shavian meeting or a Fabian conference or something terribly advanced.

### A SHINING MARK FOR SHAVIANS.

I confess, my dears, I was much relieved, for these twin interviews aren't easy. Then also, between ourselves, Gilbert is much the bigger brother of the two in more ways than the one that meets the eye. He is a brilliant and a far better and more widely read writer. He is a wit, a scholar and a speaker. He is always being attacked by George Bernard Shaw and his party, and he is a great thorn in their flesh, for he holds his own remarkably well. He is a sort of Rock of Gibraltar that they dash themselves against and cannot topple over. He differs from them on all subjects and he has their own gift of language. He scintillates and caps their epigrams with others, and what maddens them is that he insists upon standing for creeds, for marriage and the home, for the public house well managed, and for all sorts of established institutions that they jeer at and would cast down.

He parries all their attacks with a lightness and skill amazing in so weighty a person.

"Aha, Chesterton, I have thee on the hip," chuckles Shaw, as he strikes a vital, epigrammatic blow.

"You err, my noble friend," responds Chesterton politely, and leaps aside with the grace of an antelope.

This goes on year after year, while Bernard Shaw gets leaner and leaner and leaner on his vegetables and cold water, and Gilbert Chesterton grows more and more ponderous on his roast beef and small beer of Old England.

Personally, I consider it is hard luck for G. K. to have his one and only little brother go over to the enemy, but he doesn't mind. I think he rather likes it. It is supposed that they commenced arguing in infancy and started printed attacks on each other as soon as they learned their alphabets.

### A FAMILY SECRET DIVULGED.

"My brother is a man of the highest moral character and the most abominable opinions," said G. K. to me when, feeling sure that Master Cecil was not available, I asked for him and about him.

Mr. Gilbert Chesterton lives on the top of a high hill in Beaconsfield.

"There's a lovely garden, with all sorts of flowers trying to grow primly in quaintly cut beds and borders, and a cunning, little house with latticed windows, comfortable, heavy old furniture and gay chintzes.

I don't believe it's so much that the house is little as it is that Mr. Chesterton is so big and imposing in himself. When I first saw the cottage I can't remember remarking upon its limited dimensions, but when my host came out to greet me it seemed to shrink into a very small home for so great a man.

Mr. Chesterton is very tall and broad and thick. He has a fine head, with a mane of shaggy curls, and he has rather prominent blue eyes, which have in them the same glint of whimsical mischief that lurks in the eyes of one Bernard Shaw.

In short, he looks something as I believe Rabelais may have, and a good deal as I'm sure Dr. Johnson must have, and just as I had fairly located him as a kind of pleasant reincarnation of the gruff, old tea-drinking doctor, he clinched the matter by saying hospitably:

"Won't you have a cup of tea?"

I declined, partly because I wanted to get to our interview without further preamble and partly because, though I like tea, I'm not yet English enough to feel that when four-thirty comes if I don't have it I can go no further.

"Oh, won't you, really?" he urged, in the vexed tone of a small boy who has been rebuffed.

I took pity on him.

I sensed that it was tea time in the House of Chesterton and that if I didn't accept tea and talk I might not get talk, so I changed my mind in graceful and womanly fashion and assured him that the very soul of me craved tea.

We sat down at a square, substantial table, with a substantial meal spread out upon it, and a most substantial teapot crowning its glories.

Over this Mr. Chesterton presided in a real Johnsonian manner, and certainly with a Johnsonian taste for the cheering beverage.

When I had finished sipping the modest one cup to which I confine myself I ventured to inquire if I might put a few questions.

"Of course," beamed G. K., shaking back his curls and squaring his shoulders like a Viking, scenting battle, "I love questions. I'm always ready to ask them and answer them. Anybody can drag me into an argument, you know. I think it's a weakness, but there you are! I'm so constituted that I can't even read of prejudice and ignorance without having a passion to ask about and reply to it. Also, I warn you one of my favorite subjects is myself, and, incidentally, my own opinions."

And he grinned in a nice, friendly way, as much as to say: "I'll enjoy it all the more, if you take me perfectly seriously."

"Oh, that's all right," I cooed. And I tucked my feet up under the chair while G. K. poured out his fourth cup of tea. Then, when the sugar and milk were safely doing their work, with the aid of the spoon, I asked:

### HIS KIND OF DEMOCRACY.

"Exactly what are your politics?"

"I'm a democrat," replied Mr. Chesterton firmly and with conviction. "A democrat in the best sense of the word. The thing I stand for is almost isolated in England to-day. It's certainly dead in the Liberal government. In fact, I believe there are only about four of us to be found in the country."

"Who are the three others?"

G. K. paused for a moment, then answered:

"Hilaire Belloc, Cunningham Grahame and Quiller Couch."

"But don't you call Bernard Shaw democratic?" I asked with a wide-eyed, wondering gaze, just as if the news hadn't reached me that he wouldn't let G. B. S. play in his backyard.

Mr. Chesterton had a Johnsonian fit of rage at this childlike, harmless question. He gulped his hot tea so suddenly that I could see the result was painful. He turned quite purplish in hue and banged his massive hand down on the table as he exclaimed in an "Are you mad, woman?" tone:

"Bernard Shaw democratic? Why, of course, he isn't. Shaw a democrat! Ha, ha! Why he's absolutely anti-democratic!"

Then, as if this outburst had assuaged his wrath, he continued more mildly.

"Shaw always criticises man from the position of one not of mankind. He never takes his stand with his fellow creatures. He talks, acts and feels as one apart. He has no more respect for the composite conscience than Henry VIII had. Brilliant men like Shaw ought to be honored with differential calmness, but don't think of them as democratic. Personally, I'd rather be tried by a jury of ordinary men than by Shaw if I wanted justice and understanding."

MR. CHESTERTON PRESIDED OVER THE TEAPOT IN A REAL JOHNSONIAN MANNER.

"Oh, but don't you think he is changing, growing more serious?" I pleaded for the prisoner at the bar.

"Only in one way," asserted G. K. remorselessly. "He's beginning to understand that men cannot live just by fireworks. It's not enough to slowly break windows. He's trying now to have a constructive policy, but he isn't really constructive. He hasn't anything to build upon, and he has no traditions."

"Surely, he's a sincere socialist," I chirped, brightly.

G. K. fairly snorted the word "socialism!"

"Well, what of it?" I asked, plucking up spirit, even as Boswell did on rare occasions. "Don't you believe in its future? If you're such a good democrat I should think you might be a bit of a socialist yourself."

Mr. Chesterton deliberately poured out his umpty-umph cup of tea and prepared it to his liking; then he said:

"I don't see that socialism necessarily involves democracy, and as I can't accept collectivism as a remedy for existing ills I am not a socialist in the present sense of the word. I consider that in man there is a natural desire to own, and that socialism, since it fails to gratify that desire, will be intolerable to the mass of men. Collectivism is not a word to wake them up. Liberty is. If you want the workingman to fight for progress you must offer him the thing for which he fights best, his own honor and his own home. We all have the instinct for possession. It's a birthright. We want to own things, if for no other reason than to play the fool with them. Look here," and he pointed out of the window to a nearby plot of ground with a long low building on it.

I peered at it through my goggles.

"Distinctively attractive," I murmured approvingly.

"That isn't the point," exclaimed Dr. Johnson—I mean, Mr. Chesterton. "The point is that it's mine and I've built a studio on it. This house I live in belongs to a very decent little man. We are on the best of terms, he and I. But the place is his; nothing can change that, and across there is something quite mine own."

"I know," I nodded sympathetically. "I've got that same feeling about my few small possessions. But will things adjust themselves so we all have our own bit, and how will it come about?"

"This capitalistic system will smash up of itself. Hordes of people are being crushed by the fear of starvation at present, but there is a sort of pain which becomes so intense that the victim faints. When things are as bad as that, then capitalism will come to an end."

I was getting sort of bewildered. Everything seemed so hopeless and far away, but I clung to the spar of the simple question.

"Well, Mr. Chesterton, if you don't believe in imperialism or capitalism or the present government or socialism, will you please tell what you have to offer?"

Here I had to pause and wipe my brow, for really these reformers are very trying to a novice, and there are so many of them here, all getting in their fine work on poor old Britain! The woods are full of 'em, and they aren't all men, either, as you know.

G. K. smiled upon me reassuringly.

"Certainly I will," he answered amiably, and taking up a teaspoon he drew a sort of scheme on the tablecloth as he talked.

"I want to abolish, not property, but the wealthy and the unemployed. I don't plank down a Utopia in my programme, because a Utopia is a thing uninteresting to a thinking man, but I do plank down these simple statements, that a man will not be humanly happy unless he owns something. That this can be achieved only by setting steadily to work to distribute property, not to concentrate it; that history proves that property can be so redistributed, and remain so distributed, while history has no record of successful collectivism outside monasteries."

"Thank you so much!" I gushed, and stopped for breath. "Now I know where I am, or, rather, where you are. Will all this really come?"

"I think so."

"Will there be a revolution?" panted I, visioning a terrible battle, and, when peace was restored, Gilbert Keith Chesterton with a laurel wreath on his curls, distributing chunks of the Duke of Devonshire's estates and the Duke of Westminster's houses and shops to various prize winners.

"I haven't much hope of a revolution," replied G. K., sadly. "You know, the fall of Rome didn't really come to pass with a great and sudden crash. It was a long time before Rome gradually took a back place among nations."

Then Chesterton the reformer became Chesterton the scholar, and discoursed wisely of Rome and other nations which rose but to fall. Of course, we drifted round to America as a land of milk and honey and progress.

"Aren't you thinking of coming over to see us?" I asked.

"I want to go very much. I've met many Americans and liked them immensely, but I feel I know nothing of them in their homes. I know nothing of the country or its conditions and political battles except from reading. I want to judge it all for myself. I believe, as far as I can tell, that I am in sympathy with the old Democratic party there. I would be in agreement with a man like Bryan, for instance. Do you ever read Walt Whitman?"

"I-yes, sometimes," I stammered. It was so sudden.

"Well. I was just thinking that it was to an American that I owe the kick-off of my whole spiritual life. It was to Walt Whitman, a great writer and thinker."

"Really," I said, sympathetically, and watched with interest the dreamy expression that stole into Mr. Chesterton's blue eyes.

Then Mr. Chesterton drained his last cup of tea, and tore himself away from the table much refreshed and strengthened, and we went into the sitting room, where three small boys were at play. They weren't the least disturbed at our entrance. Evidently they regarded G. K. as a man and a brother. They merely grinned at him and ignored me.

"Your sons?" I inquired.

"No," replied G. K. "I haven't any children of my own, so I always have those of other people staying with me."

Then he did the stern parent act.

"Out you go," he shouted, with a dramatic wave of the arm.

The three boys grinned more than ever, but they obediently packed up their belongings and trailed away, with nods of understanding at their big friend.

And we settled ourselves in chairs after the Great and Little Bear fashion in the fairy tale. Mr. Chesterton carefully chose the largest and heaviest piece of furniture in the room for his ample needs, and I gracefully disposed myself on a small and fragile bit of Chippendale.

"What do you think of the science of eugenics?" I asked chattily.

My dears, I wasn't at all prepared for his answer, and perhaps you'd better skip it, for all he said was:

"It stinks!"

"Oh!" I gasped, and again "Oh!"

He didn't take any notice of my shudders.

You see he believes and talks a lot about the beauty of commonplace things, and no doubt he feels the same way about the force of commonplace words.

"Yes," he said with a wave of his arms. "This whole eugenic heresy is an excuse for establishing medical tyranny, and we have enough of that already. Even now the lunacy laws give dangerous powers to the medical fraternity."

"But don't you believe in heredity?"

"It's not necessary to deny the science of heredity in order to resist the rampagings of eugenics, any more than it is necessary to deny the supernatural in order to resist an epidemic of witch burning. Any one who was morbid, any one who was unpopular, any one who disliked children or liked the blacker sort of scandal, any one of this kind or any startling unusual kind, used, in past ages, to be supposed to be drawing not on the evil in the human heart, but on the evil beyond. It might be devil worship; therefore, it was. It would be precisely the same with a case under the feeble minded bill, if may be hereditary and, therefore, it will be. Public opinion gives the same general assent to the theory of heredity as public opinion then gave to the invention of the devil, but only very cranky and cruel men went about looking for witches, and only very cranky and cruel men will go about segregating the feeble minded. The mass of the nation would count such work dirtier than the hangman's. But in both cases the nation would agree generally with the theory on which the thing was based, that there are witches and that there are hereditary imbeciles. If we want to avoid in the second case any such hell as we had in the first, we must insist that in regard to the degenerate as to the witch, the danger lies not in the strictness, but in the looseness of the definition. It isn't that the phrase covers nothing, but that it covers far too much."

"Now, I wonder what you mean by that," I followed along.

I was terribly interested in his ideas, and I didn't mean to interrupt, but I do hate paradoxes, and they are so fashionable here. You haven't any idea how much in vogue they are. I know the English used to be considered a solid, plain-spoken race, but they aren't any more. At least, not the brilliant ones. The way they describe a thing now is to dash all around it in beautiful, scintillating circles, and then drop down upon it with a brilliant metaphorical swoop.

### A CHESTERTON MENTAL FLAW.

G. K. took pity upon me.

"I mean that, just as the old woman in the cottage might have been silent from disappointment and hated children from bitterness, and yet have been marked as a witch, so the testing of the feeble-minded is too loose and leaves out many of the complexities of life. A lad of seventeen may be an irresponsible moon calf. It may be hereditary, but it may be all sorts of things—sometimes shyness, sometimes genius, sometimes just a pose. Nearly all of us can remember a time when parents and school teachers thought us not only very stupid, but quite hopelessly so, and thought it justly; and almost every one of us knows that he is still on some point startlingly below the mental average. Take me, for instance—I have a good memory for form and physical proportion, so that I could draw from recollection; I have a good eye for distance and direction, but in the third sense of proportion—the sense of the passage of time—I am almost an idiot. I can describe scenes and incidents of my recent life accurately, but whether they happened a week or a year ago I haven't an idea. Yet I know I shan't be segregated, and I know why I shan't be."

He paused, and I hesitated as to whether I should ask why or not. A difficult position, you see. He might expect me to inquire and he might resent it if I did; so I decided to discreetly sit tight and wait. And I chose the better course.

"I shan't be segregated," continued Mr. Chesterton, shaking his forefinger at me waggishly, "because this modern campaign is from the first a campaign against those who are weak from impoverishment. Give the people good conditions, improve their environment, and all will tend toward the highest type."

Here again the rapt look came into the Chesterton eyes.

### MYSTERY TO THE SHAVIANS.

He's a strange mixture. Something of a materialist, something of a religionist, something of a dreamer, a philosopher, a reformer, a scholar, a jester and an artist. No wonder the Shavians don't know how to place him, and other sects are equally puzzled.

I left him feeling quite depressed about England, for I'm fond of the country. But, bless you, it wasn't the first time I've worried about her, because all these reformers insist upon pointing out what a dreadful future is in store for her. And it isn't only the reformers either. It just seems to be the fashion to say "England's going to the dogs!" and yet, you know, the dear old lady appears to be holding her own pretty well!

Anyhow, his country's grave condition of broadmindedness didn't trouble Mr. Chesterton after he had mentioned it apparently, for the last I saw of him he was playing with the three sturdy little Britons and looking like a particularly massive Gulliver among the Lilliputians.

Now that it is all safely over I can't help wishing I had had the Corsican—I mean Chesterton—brothers closeted together talking against time.

I'm positive everything Gilbert said would have disagreed violently with Cecil and there would have been ructions as sure as fate and taxes. I imagine they would have just interviewed each other for the millionth time and ignored me altogether.



"THIS WHOLE EUGENIC HERESY IS AN EXCUSE FOR ESTABLISHING MEDICAL TYRANNY."

"I WARN YOU ONE OF MY FAVORITE SUBJECTS IS MYSELF."